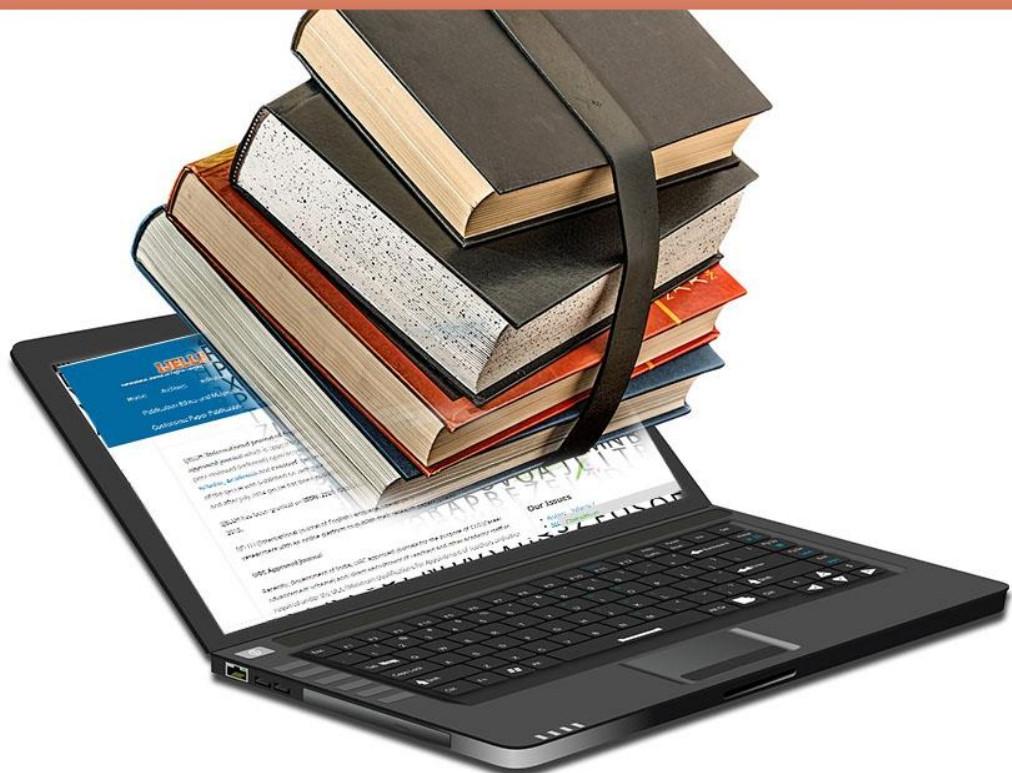


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Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): A need to enhance English Language

Learning in the 21st century.

Abstract

Content and Language Integrated learning (CLIL) serves to be one of the best tools available in the English teaching curriculum in the present century. It has not been extensively used as a method of language teaching in India. There are various concerns pertaining to the healthy use of CLIL in the English and communication classrooms. Western countries have used this method and have achieved good results. With a spurge of colleges offering professional courses ranging from medicine to fields of engineering in India, it is definitely a time to evaluate the success of the English Language learning curriculum in India. It is observed that no matter how good a student is in their subject of interest, if the basics of English communication are not imbibed, these students may not fare very well in their recruitment process which includes group discussions and most importantly interviews. This paper touches the current trend of CLIL and if it is a necessity in the present curriculum of private universities offering professional courses in Shillong, Meghalaya.

Keywords- CLIL, Language Skills, Professional courses,

1. Introduction

There has been a lot of discussion and research in the recent years pertaining to the subject of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Attention has been grabbed particularly in the states of India where private schools, colleges and universities have thrived and are thriving. With conventional courses and curriculum not being able to hone professional skills of the students which is the need of the hour, it is inevitable that new dimensions towards language learning are to be implemented. The courses introduced in the twenty first century have the backdrop of employability. Therefore, teaching English in the present century in India has to look into the different variables of language learning to equip the students with necessary language skills in their field of expertise. With globalization, a sense of need to comprehensibly understand the various subjects for employability keeping intact a sense of one's own culture has led to a thorough study and research of CLIL. This paper aims to find out the applicability of CLIL if implemented as a large scale program in Shillong, Meghalaya.

2. Development of CLIL

CLIL was coined in Europe in the early nineties to describe the kind of language teaching which is not specific to the areas of language learning but, provides a platform of learning through the concentration of the non language subject matter. Marsh (2002) further affirms that Language is integrated with subject content to provide a successful language learning process. Bonces (2012) states that "CLIL not only implies the teaching of content through English but remarks the importance language has when teaching content". The content that is taught has to have a dual objective. One has to learn the subject content and also to have a language achievement goal.

2.1 Targets of CLIL and its benefits

CLIL has definite patterns which provide key indicators on the success of Language learnt through the subject matter. The modes of transmission for imparting “CLIL models range from theme based language modules to cross circular approaches where a content subject is taught through the foreign language” (Harrop, 2012). These modes of transmission which are based on themes pertaining to the subject matter further look to achieve a successful learning by concentrating on targeted skills. Coyle et al (2010) points that CLIL takes place through five dimensions namely progression in knowledge, skills and understanding of content, engagement in higher order cognitive processing, interaction in the communicative context, development of appropriate communication skills, and acquisition of a deepening intercultural awareness.

With technological advancement, the present generation is witnessing a spurt in the usage of mobile phones, tablets, laptops and other devices both in the students as well as in the teaching fraternity. No doubt, the use of such technology has greatly been an advantage for the academic fraternity, however, the present generation of students and teachers alike have turned to such technology for every single bit of information clarification and calculation. This saves a lot of time, but, also reduces the person’s mental ability for information is not stored in the mind anymore or one does not try to memorize anymore. Therefore, keeping in mind the dimensions which CLIL incorporates, it would be highly beneficial for the present generation students to be acquainted with the learning process through CLIL. CLIL seeks to provide a platform for cognitivity and improves the thinking ability of the students. This has been shown with evidence from Harrop (2012), “The outcomes of most CLIL programmes are unsurprisingly positive, with CLIL students displaying higher levels of proficiency and higher communicative competence than their non-CLIL peers”

3. Problems of CLIL in language learning

There is a distinct misconception that CLIL has been able to resolve the problems which may arise due to the clash between a subject content and a language learning process. Coyle (2007) notes that CLIL does not seem to be an underpinning practice and therefore, certain other methods of language learning may be needed to support the successful learning. No doubt, it is not easy for the language teacher to know everything apart from the language teaching curriculum. Cummins (1998) show that the CLIL programs still has an insufficient focus on form. This can be due to the problems of evaluation and progression when CLIL is imposed and students are expected to have a fair competency of grammar at a theoretical level. There are still a lot of unclear methods to give teachers the idea of a direct solution to the theory. The CLIL method still has its loopholes which have not all been identified and if so, may be rectified.

The idea to learn a subject is taken care of from the teacher's perspective, but, from the learner's perspective, it becomes very difficult. Simultaneously, it is expected for the learner to do well in the subject and in the language. If one does not do well, it becomes very difficult to push the weaker learners to be at par with the good learners. The system of spotting an error and their rectification becomes more difficult in the CLIL model.

4. Need for the English Language

As subjects are becoming interdisciplinary in their own ways and branching out to different dimensions based on present subjects, the need of efficient language becomes inevitable in each and every core subject. Language serves as a bridge which helps one cross the river of misunderstanding. Trainers imparting English for specific purposes (ESP), Content Based Language Teaching (CBLT), Content Based Instruction (CBI) are constantly

imparting a dual based curriculum or rather CLIL. One of the major trends of teaching English Language along the important subjects is because a thorough preparation in the English Language through understanding the subject matter increases the confidence of the students and helps them to prepare for their respective profession.

4.1 Objective of English Language learning

One of the main objectives of English learning is to expose students to different cultures and thereby prepare them for an international audience or international profession. Cummins (2000) states that when integrating content and language, students have the opportunity to acquire both Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills (CALPS) with the former being all the social language skills and the latter the language skills to cope with academic requirements". When dealing with the English language, a sense of confidence is built within the student to be socially active amongst peers when dealing with discussions on subject related matters. Not forgetting one's roots, but, the language is learnt for social and professional development in one's own area of interest. CLIL also increases language learning motivation of the learners and by doing so, would definitely create a positive impact on learning.

The other objective of language learning through CLIL is that learners would be able to interact, explain and importantly transfer knowledge through the target language. The ultimate goal is to be able to communicate efficiently through the acquired language. Marsh et al. (2001) has given five dimensions that CLIL touches upon. They are Culture, environment, content, language and learning. All these dimensions co exist and one cannot be independent of the other for a successful language and subject learning. If these dimensions are adhered to, then it is most likely that learners would be highly competitive in the twenty first century job market.

5. Teaching of English in colleges of Shillong, Meghalaya

The teaching of English in colleges of Shillong, Meghalaya is still being done in the conventional method following the curriculum where the English subject is a separate entity altogether with a maximum of one hundred marks. It may also be noticed that when a learner has the option to choose Science or Commerce or Arts stream in their higher secondary classes, the compulsory subject is always English which in most cases has always been the teachings of prose and poetry without putting much emphasis on communicative English. The concept of learning English through literature is highly commendable but, when it comes to practise, there is a complete disconnect between the subject interests of the learner and what is being taught in the English language class. Assignments are also based on prose and poetry which they are taught in. Prose and poetry have not been used for the enhancement of communication skills. They have been enforced on a learner whether they like it or not because the final marks would be counted in their final GPA. This causes a negative effect on the motivation of the learner. The learner would not be able to concentrate on the main subjects as the thought of having to put in more effort on the non interest subject (English) would definitely cause a lot of distraction. English therefore, should serve as an element of support for the core courses and not be a burden for the learners.

The teachers need to constantly strive for new methods and techniques for a successful learning of the core subject. Bonces (2012) states “Materials should consider existing knowledge contextual, contextual clues and thinking skills and if possible the inclusion of interdisciplinary experiences that bring active engagement”. It should be noted that the learners are to be competent enough in their core subjects using language only as a means to be able to understand, analyse, explain, judge, etc. However, the conventional methods of teaching which involves following the same objectives, planning and materials

would definitely pose as a problem to initialize CLIL. The professional development of the teachers should be kept in check with support from the administration to provide teachers a platform to grow through innovative and up to date trends in teaching of the subject through a target language.

6. Conclusion

CLIL encompasses the dimensions which gives a high note of success for language learners. Though, there might be a trial and error period until the success is felt, but, a starting point is a must. This has to come from the various administrative offices, allowing a change in the system of teaching and learning which would be in accordance to the need of the present century. To follow the right language teaching method, teachers in the core subjects as well as the language teachers must be well versed with their subjects. There should be a collaborative method of teaching amongst the teachers. For the idea of CLIL to materialize there has to be a comprehensive planning according to the needs of the students and the assessment should also be needs based. The main focus of CLIL is to increase the amount of exposure of the target language through a subject of choice. This, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs increases motivation to learn the language because the ultimate goal is to learn the preferred subject. This is the real concept of language acquisition where language has not been forced to learn.

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